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# **In Vitro Fertilization: Destroyer of Christian Marriage**

by

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Recent advances in the technology of the biological sciences have revolutionized the specialty of genetics. Who would have thought that at the end of the twentieth century, the entire human genome would be in the process of being mapped and that the potential for identifying and correcting defective genes has indeed become a reality? Who would ever believe that at this same time in history in the United States of America the Nazi holocaust could again be relived through the misuse of these scientific technologies as applied to humanity? This paper will examine the nature of Christian marriage along with the rights and moral responsibilities of the spouses as related to the begetting of children as revealed by God through the Church's Magisterium. The issue of creating life through in vitro fertilization will be analyzed and related to current proposals of scientific experimentation on human embryos. The morality of pre-natal testing and diagnosis will be examined as related to the rights and obligations of the child, the parents, and health care professionals. Finally, an analysis of using fetal tissue obtained from induced abortions for organ transplantations in the treatment of adult disease will be offered.

Christian marriage has an absolutely unique role in expressing God's love for humanity and in God's plan for redeeming and saving mankind. When God created the universe and man, He did so in an act rooted in perfect love. In making humans in His own Divine Image, God chose to share the power to create life with human beings. Humans are, therefore, "co-creators" which reflects that as humans we are not the ultimate source of life that is created — God is. The responsibility in creating life, therefore, finds its meaning only in Christian marriage which mirrors God's act of creation intrinsically rooted in perfect love. This forms the basis for the two aspects of conjugal love in marriage: the unitive and the procreative. These two dimensions reflect the fact

that in marriage the spouses cooperate with God in transmitting life when "the two become one flesh" uniting in the conjugal act rooted in love and in that love they remain open to the creation of new life, of which God is the origin and source. Here is the ultimate expression of love in marriage that reflects God's infinite love which is directed beyond Himself in creating humanity and the universe. Scientific procedures or behavioral actions that cause a rupture between the unitive and procreative dimensions are intrinsically disordered because the natural order is disturbed: no longer are human beings cooperating with God as "co-creators;" rather, humans set themselves up to be absolute masters and controllers of life—humans attempt to usurp the place of God Himself.

### **"Right" to a Child**

One of the procedures designed to help couples with fertility problems and to create human embryos for scientific observation, experimentation, and manipulation is in vitro fertilization. This technique involves the fertilization of an oocyte by a spermatozoon in a test tube. The resulting cell formed—the zygote—is usually then transferred to the uterus for implantation or subjected to a procedure called "cryopreservation" which freezes the embryo for future use. If gametes are introduced from a third party outside of the marriage, the in vitro fertilization is said to be "heterologous." The moral analysis of the issues present here calls us to the recognition that no one has a "right" to a child; rather, a child is a free gift given to his parents by God. Each child has a right to be conceived as a direct result of his parent's love in utero. The technique of in vitro fertilization disassociates the unitive from the procreative dimensions, thus rendering this procedure to be intrinsically immoral by allowing conception to occur outside of the body, which violates the child's right to be conceived as a direct result of his parent's love. In the case of heterologous in vitro fertilization, an additional moral violation occurs by the introduction of gametes from a third party outside the marriage: the agreement of the spouses in marriage to become parents in and through each other alone. While the Church recognizes the suffering caused by infertility and the sincere subjective intentions of a couple desiring a child, the objective nature of in vitro fertilization remains fundamentally disordered because of the rupture between the unitive and procreative dimensions which denies the child conceived the right to be created as a direct result of his parent's love.

In the last several years, modern biological genetics has unequivocally been able to answer exactly when a human life begins. Many have declared that the zygote is simply an undifferentiated cell mass. The eminent geneticist Professor Jerome LeJeune — recipient of the Allen Memorial Award Medal, which is the highest award in the field of Genetics in the world — reveals to us what is now known regarding the beginning of human life:

Each human has a unique beginning which occurs at the moment of conception . . . A unique personal constitution is spelled out for the specific human being then created, which personal constitution has never occurred before and will never occur again . . . The zygote is the most specialized cell under the sun in that no other cell will ever have the same instructions in the life of the individual being created . . . As the cell develops,



nothing new is learned by the developing cells, but progressively a lot of things are forgotten. In other words, the information is written in the first cell and it is not written progressively in the other cells . . . The new findings prove differentiation and from the very beginning there exists an embryo . . . As soon as he has been conceived, a man is a man.

It is scientifically erroneous to conclude today that modern biological science knows not that a human life begins at conception.

Recently a panel of nineteen experts appointed by the National Institutes of Health (NIH) recommended government funding for conceiving human embryos in laboratories for the sole purpose of using them as materials for research. This means that the monies paid in taxes by the American people to our government have been recommended for the purpose of experimenting on human embryos which have been created through in vitro fertilization. It should be noted that, due to the low success rate of embryos surviving transfer and being implanted into a uterus, the procedure of in vitro fertilization strives to create a number of human embryos with the hope that at least one survives implantation and others can be "cryopreserved" (frozen) for future use. "Extra human embryos" are then available for scientific observation, manipulation, and genetic experimentation. It should be obvious that in vitro fertilization is an intrinsic violation of the moral law because of the disassociation between the unitive and the procreative dimensions in marriage. This rupture fails to respect the right of the new life conceived to come into existence as a result of his parents' love in utero. Secondly, the process of observing human embryos to gain scientific knowledge or removing a cell(s) from them constitutes a heinous crime against their dignity by exposing them to the risk of grave harm as in cryopreservation — if not certain death. One scientific study reported an unexpectedly high rate of two types of congenital malformation — spina bifida and transposition of the great vessels — among those conceived in Australia and New Zealand using in vitro fertilization and Gamete Intra-Fallopian Transfer (GIFT). Thirdly, there is a violation of the doctrine of informed consent — no parent has the moral freedom, even for their own child, to grant informed consent for research, experimentation, or treatment that is not directly therapeutic and also proportionate to the risks involved in the treatment of a specific disorder. Despite the noble intentions and possible tremendous gain in scientific knowledge obtained from these procedures, they are seriously immoral because they fail to show unconditional respect for the lives of new human beings who have come into existence. This is an attack against the dignity of each human being that God has created and willed for Himself. Not only is it an offense against human life, it is also an attack on God Who alone has dominion over all life.

Current advances in biological science allow for routine pre-natal testing and diagnosis during early pregnancy. It is not uncommon to hear specialists in Obstetrics and Gynecology state that they frequently advise pre-natal testing out of the fear of a possible litigation resulting from an unprepared mother giving birth to a "defective" child. Common procedures employed in screening for possible defects include ultrasonography, amniocentesis and karyotype, chorionic villi sampling, and measurement of various fetal proteins found in amniotic fluid. These procedures have the benefit of detecting abnormalities early in the pregnancy; hence, the procedures are not in themselves immoral. When an abnormality is found and a therapeutic treatment



can be instituted to correct the abnormality, this is morally licit as long as the risks are not disproportionate and the treatment employed truly benefits the child by correcting the underlying defect. For example, if it were determined that a human embryo carried both homozygous recessive genes for cystic fibrosis and there was a methodology to excise the gene(s) responsible for this disease and replace it with a normal gene, this indeed would be morally licit as long as the procedure was truly therapeutic and the risks were not disproportionate. Procedures that manipulate genes in human embryos according to selections for sex or pursuit of scientific knowledge or other desired characteristics are wrong and forbidden because they are not therapeutic and are contrary to the respect owed to each being — with absolutely no exceptions. If a health care professional in any capacity is involved in the procedures of pre-natal testing and diagnosis, the moral analysis of whether the procedures are morally licit or illicit is dependant on the interior motive for requesting such tests. If the motive is to abort a child when results demonstrate that he or she suffers abnormalities, such procedures are gravely immoral. Health care professionals have a fundamental obligation to refrain from performing such tests if there is an awareness that the data provided will be used to destroy an innocent human life. To engage in the performance of such tests with the knowledge that the data can be used to end a human life makes all individuals involved material cooperators in an intrinsically disordered and evil action. All scientific procedures and results from them must only be used to serve the human person which thereby respects the dignity of each and every human being.

### Use of Fetal tissue

Recent times have witnessed the use of fetal tissue obtained by induced abortion to treat adult disease by transplantation. It is not uncommon to hear people say that once the tragedy of abortion has already occurred, we might as well try to bring some good out of it by helping others. Attempts to treat Diabetes Type I, Parkinson's Disease, and Alzheimer's using fetal tissue obtained from induced abortion have been underway. Most people do not understand that to attempt transplantation for one adult disease, eight to twelve "fetuses" must be destroyed at a specific gestational period. It should be noted that fetal tissue obtained by spontaneous miscarriage or from an ectopic pregnancy is generally unsuitable for use due to bacterial contamination and/or chromosomal abnormalities. The January 4 *Journal of the American Medical Association* reported that fetal tissue should be available from induced abortion which should increase the amount of useful tissues. It is obvious that health care professionals must be on standby to obtain tissue from an induced abortion if the fetal tissue is going to be used for transplantation. Fetal tissue that is not obtained and used within three to five minutes after induced abortion is useless. This type of material cooperation is gravely illicit because it is always immoral to utilize goods obtained illicitly to bring about good (Romans 3:8) — this is the sin of scandal which is always seriously wrong. Also, a parent — and all material cooperators involved — give up the right to dispose of their child's body after death if they have requested or consented to intentional death of that child. Despite the fact

that there may be subjective intentions seemingly ordered to help others, the fact remains that objectively these procedures are intrinsically disordered. The reason is that all abortions are evil regardless of why they are performed since they destroy life and all Christians are called to avoid scandal at all costs.

The recent advances in the biological sciences present serious ethical challenges in terms of how we interact with our brothers and sisters — especially those who are so vulnerable and cannot defend themselves. As Americans, we have the opportunity to elect representatives at the state and federal levels who will use our tax monies to truly help out those in need. We have a profound moral obligation to speak out on these issues and to ensure that the men and women who represent us are not using the peoples' money to destroy human life irregardless of the knowledge obtained or the good manifested. We in the United States must remember that historically no society on this earth has ever survived when it has tolerated the killing of innocent human beings. We in the United States of America are clearly no exception.

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